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From the Office of the Director of Health

Holiday Events Can Increase Risk of Communicable Disease

Traveling home after holiday gatherings may mean returning with more than just leftovers and happy memories.

"In close settings like family gatherings, group events and airline travel your risk of being exposed to germs increases," says administrator of community health and epidemiology Kendra Williams. "After the holidays, we generally see an increase in the number of communicable disease cases, including seasonal influenza."

Williams suggests individuals protect themselves from illness by maintaining a strong immune system through healthy behaviors such as being vaccinated, practicing good hand washing, getting plenty of rest and choosing healthy foods.

The Springfield-Greene County Health Department continues to offer seasonal flu vaccinations at no cost to people considered to be at high risk of developing influenza and its complications. Those eligible include:

- Senior adults age 65 and older,
- Adults and children with chronic health conditions,
- Children 6 - 59 months old,
- Women who will be pregnant during the 2007-08 influenza season, and
- Individuals in close contact with the ill or with people in nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

Vaccinations are also available at no cost to household contacts or out-of-home caregivers of anyone in the high-risk categories listed above.

November 26th through December 2nd is recognized as National Influenza Vaccination Week. High-risk individuals are encouraged to call the health department's Westside Public Health Center at 417-874-1220 to learn how to get a flu shot. Individuals who are not considered to be at high risk are encouraged to talk to their health care provider about a flu vaccination.

Influenza vaccination builds antibodies to flu in the body over a period of about two weeks. Individuals who get a flu shot this week will have added protection as they travel or participate in December holiday gatherings.

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